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of Julius E. Olson*

The Teutonic Spirit

An Address delivered on the Occasion of the
Unveiling of a Statue to Rollo of Nor-
mandy, at Fargo, N. Dakota,
July 12th, 1912

by

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For King (A.S.)

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NOTE.

The observant reader will notice that in my address I avoided the discussion of the question as to whether Gange-Rolf of Norway was Rollo, the founder of Normandy. I did this in order not to offend the patriotic sensibilities of the Norwegian promoters of the Fargo celebration. As a matter of fact, however, there are the gravest doubts as to the identity of Gange-Rolf and Rollo, for which reason I deemed it my duty, as the orator of the occasion, to give such an interpretation of the significance of the monument as to place it on an historical pedestal that could not be shaken. On this pedestal the statue ought to be of permanent interest not only to all Scandinavians, but to Frenchmen, Britains, and Americans as well.

I appreciate the fact that the patriotic ardor of some Norwegians prevents the acceptance of my view; but as a student of Scandinavian history, I must voice the view that seems to me to accord with historic truth, whether it favors Norse prestige or not.

The most learned, searching, and convincing argument on the origin of Rollo of Normandy is to be found in a Danish work entitled "Normannerne," by Johannes C. H. R. Steenstrup, of the University of Copenhagen, published in 1876, in four volumes.

Professor Steenstrup's investigation is thoroughly scientific and exhaustive, and he takes infinite pains to guard himself against the charge of a Danish patriotic bias, as he says, "in desiring to rob Norwegian history of the glory of an exploit which is justly viewed as one of the most epoch-making events in medieval history, and which always has been cited among the memorable achievements of Norwegians."

In the large and comprehensive history of Norway, at present being issued, Professor Alexander Bugge, of the University of Christiania, makes indirect reply to Professor Steenstrup; but Bugge's contentions seem to me—much as I should be pleased to be convinced—hopelessly inadequate as a refutation of Steenstrup's arguments.

In justice to Professor Bugge, it should be said that he concedes that "absolute certainty will doubtless never be attained." Yet in concluding his argument he says: "According to my opinion there is a preponderance of probability that Rollo in reality is identical with Gange-Rolf of the sagas, and that Norway has a right to claim him. But that he ever lived in Søndmør, we know nothing about."

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The Teutonic Spirit.

A distinguished writer has said: "Whoever would completely possess the 'today,' must also grasp the 'yesterday' out of which it grew." The present shoots deep and strong roots into the dark sub-soil of the past, making the connections most difficult to follow. It is the duty of the scholar to trace and lay bare these root connections,—to illumine the path that humanity has trod. A knowledge of this path is a needful guide to a safe advance into the future of mankind. It is absolutely necessary, if we desire, with conscious wisdom and foresight, to participate in the combats of the present for the promotion of righteousness and justice among men, and for the ennoblement of human existence.

We have met here, in the very heart of the great North American continent, to note the significance of an epoch and an event that belong to another age and clime. Yet such is the flux and flexibility of human action and experience that that epoch and event have become of significance to all the people of this land and nation.

Rollo, first a roving Viking, later the sedate ruler of a French province, achieved the great act of his life a thousand years ago. It seems to us mortals a long time; but on the great clock of human experience it marks but a brief hour.

You who have assembled here today are largely of Scandinavian blood, and hence by virtue of that blood are interested in the career of that bold Viking Rollo, first Duke of Normandy. And we are, or should be, interested in him, not merely for the personal achievements of himself and his successors, but more particularly because he was a virile representative of the militant Teuton from the Scandinavian North, knocking at the portals of universal civilization, and seeking—unconsciously—an opportunity to take a hand in the work of the great world,—to join the procession of progress and high human endeavor. In this sense, it matters not whether Rollo was Dane or Norseman—over which there has been much bandying of words. The essential and significant fact is that he was an unfettered representative of the free North, seeking a field of activity for his superfluous physical power and energy, ready and eager to fight for a footing in a wider world than his own ancestral home, and where he was destined—unconsciously, as I have said,—to leave his mark on the page of universal history.

The best gauge of the importance of that mark on foreign lands and peoples is our knowledge, ever deepening and widening with the years, of the achievements of the Scandinavians on their native peninsulas and islands, and in their own northern colonies, apart from the intimate association of other peoples. That is a long and interesting story which only during the last half century has really been revealed to the world. A century ago the history of ancient Scandinavia was practically a sealed book. A peep into that book, now open to the world, will give us glimpses of life in Scandinavia before the founding of Athens and Rome,—glimpses of an age as remote as when Homer sang to the Greeks, and when Abraham tended his flocks in the land of Canaan. Though the Scandinavian tribes were beyond the ken of Hebrew prophet and chronicler, they, too, were waging the war of life in the primeval forests of the Scandinavian North.

As fruits and grain ripen earlier in a warm clime, and likewise grow in greater multiplicity of species, so the races of the Orient and the Mediterranean world came to a much earlier maturity than the races of the North of Europe. But though the time of maturity was long deferred, the slow growth produced an excellent fiber, so that limb and branch of the storm-tried racial trunk was well adapted to wrestle with the winds of fate and fortune in the centuries to come.

The ancient Greeks called the tribes in the North "Hyperboreans,"—the dwellers beyond the North wind. And their home was, so far as we know, first visited by the Mediterranean people in the fourth century before Christ,—by the Greek merchant Pytheas, at a time when Alexander the Great was marching his Greek cohorts against the Persians, about the year 330 B. C. He sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, circumnavigated Britain, and then visited the shores of west central Norway, and later the "land of amber," doubtless north Germany or southern Denmark. Pytheas's account of this great and daring voyage, of which some fragments have been preserved to us through Greek and Roman writers, presents the first positive written allusion to the Scandinavian North. Important foreign chroniclers do not speak until some centuries after Christ, nor do the written records preserved by the Scandinavians themselves.

And yet we are able to tell a great deal of human life and activity in the Scandinavian North hundreds of years before the Christian era. For all over Scandinavia, from the mountains of the North to the southern plains of Sweden and Denmark, in field and wood, in bogs and cairns, barrows and burial mounds, thousands upon thousands of implements and ornaments of stone and bronze, of gold and iron, and other relics of infinite variety have been found,—silent witnesses that have

enabled scholars to reconstruct, in a measure, that hoary past.

The result of these studies has been astounding. The isolated position of the Scandinavian lands,—their remoteness from Mediterranean civilization, made possible a slow, gradual, and healthy development, undisturbed by hostile foreign influences. As a result, the various epochs of prehistoric man can nowhere be so clearly traced as in Scandinavia, especially Denmark and southern Sweden, which, with North Germany, was not only the primitive home of the Scandinavians, but also of all other Teutonic tribes. This occasion does not present the opportunity to demonstrate this hypothesis. I can only declare that it is now the concensus of opinion among great investigators that the primitive home of that great race known as the Teutonic—the progenitor of Goths, Franks, Germans, Anglo-Saxons, to mention only a few of the tribes,—was on the shores of the Baltic and the North sea. We may designate it more particularly the Baltic Center, or the Baltic Hive, for from it for centuries there was a constant swarming of tribes in every direction. Here is the soil on which the ancestors of these nations that I have enumerated developed out of most primitive conditions. And it was a splendid soil in which to grow. Everything required by people in an early stage of civilization was to be found there. This fact was one of the great archeological surprises of the nineteenth century.

Whence the scattered families originally came that wandered into this northern clime, and why they were mainly a blond race, I cannot undertake to discuss. It would lead us back too far into a misty past. Suffice it to say: We know the primitive Teuton only in northern Europe. But we know, furthermore, from the science of language, that this race of Teutons was linguistically, and perhaps racially, related to the Greeks and Romans, but not to the Hebrew race or other Semites.

There was another important race in northern and central Europe that must here be mentioned, namely the Celts. They were next neighbors to the Teutons, akin to them as were the Greeks and Romans, and in remote ages influenced them profoundly. But in the bird's eye view of the European situation that I feel obliged to give, I shall, for the sake of brevity, speak only of the Teutonic race, as the chief representative of the races of northern Europe at the time when the hero of this occasion, Rollo the Norman, appeared on the stage of European history.

As I have already indicated, the races of northern Europe were not known to Greece and Rome until Pytheas visited them in the 4th century before Christ. Only fragments of his account, however, have come down to us. No German in heathen times, so far as we know, ever undertook to give an account of

his people. This task fell first to the hands of two Romans: Julius Cæsar, during the middle of the century before Christ, and Tacitus, toward the end of the first century after Christ.

About this time, began the clash between Teutonic tribes and the old Roman Empire, which eventually ended with its fall, since which time the Teutons have played the leading role in the history of the world. If this be true, it can readily be inferred that these Teutons must, from the beginning, have been endowed with most excellent physical and intellectual qualities, in order to have been able to maintain their supremacy so long. American civilization is based on English civilization, and English civilization, like French and German, is fundamentally Teutonic.

But we must not claim too much. The Teutonic civilization of today is deeply, profoundly indebted to the contributions of other races.

In the first place, the Christian religion, the greatest contribution of all, came from an alien race. The birth of Christ is the most stupendous, momentous, and beneficent event in the history of the world, despite the astounding fact that it has brought more wars, misery, and persecution than tongue can tell. Why? Not on account of anything inherent in the gospel of Christ, but because that gospel was received by most of the Teutonic races from the hand of Rome, which for centuries, and by virtue of the magic of Christ's name, wielded despotic worldly power. It took some centuries before the Teutons realized the dangers of this power. I shall return to this point later.

I was speaking of the gospel of Christ as a factor of primal and supreme importance to modern civilization. It became the red thread in Teutonic life as the various tribes, one by one, came into contact with it.

The next great fact in modern civilization is the element of Greek culture. Every student knows of the profound importance of Greek art, literature, philosophy, and science to modern life. This may be indicated by the statement that without the great Greek thinkers and scholars, the work of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Newton would have been impossible. This Greek culture was produced by men of great genius,—great personalities whose names are familiar to every school boy in Christendom. It was these great personalities that led Greece, and thus eventually Europe and her great colonies, into the real daylight of human life. Greek democracy, however, was a delusion.

The next great fact in our civilization is the political and social influence of Rome. I do not here refer to the Christian influences; they came from another race, though Rome became the mightiest propogator of them. Rome was strong in what

Greece lacked. She had no great artists, poets, and philosophers; but she had great statesmen and warriors. She developed and gave to the world a comprehensive and adequate idea of law and the state. The state was evolved from the family. This was a noble conception, unknown to the Greeks. The machinery of modern governmental administration is today largely Roman.

And now the question arises: Why do we call our present civilization Teutonic, when such fundamental qualities as I have indicated came from Judea, Greece, and Rome? What contribution have the Teutons made to their own institutions and civilization?

It became the mission of the Teutons to liberate the conscience of men, and incidentally to rescue agonizing humanity from the clutches of ecclesiastical despotism. A noble mission, indeed, and one that demanded towering gift and endowment,—physical, intellectual, and spiritual. And this endowment the Teutons had, for in the course of centuries they proved themselves to be the very greatest power in the history of mankind.

How little did Cæsar and Tacitus comprehend the real Teutons whom they both met and tried to describe! How little did they suspect the mighty qualities that lay dormant in the blood of those rude warriors,—their mighty capacity for culture and civilization, their deep and profound possibilities for religious fervor and sincere piety!

Indeed, we ourselves, are just beginning to comprehend our own origins, our own endowments, our own achievements.—our own selves. It is high time, forsooth, that we come to this understanding; for momentous questions of our Teutonic civilization are crying for solution, and we need the light of our own historic experience to guide us aright. That historic experience is vast, far-reaching, and profound,—significant even to you Scandinavians, as Scandinavians, on the prairies of the great Northwest.

To answer, somewhat more in detail, the question that I myself have raised as to the contribution of the Teutons to their own institutions and culture, I do not presume to reply on the basis of my own limited studies in the enormous field of Teutonic antiquities, history, and literature. I rely mainly on the investigations of the world's greatest scholars in the various fields of European history.

In the first place, then, northern Europe is the home of the Teuton. As a physical product, he is sprung from the soil, so to speak. Northern and central Europe was his by right of primitive possession. It was his playground and battlefield, that he had a right to control.

When Tacitus visited Germania in the first century after

Christ, he saw many tribes. But his keen eye saw that all were of the same racial stock. He said: "The physical characteristics of these men are the same, and I am convinced that the various tribes of Germania, unpolluted by marriages with alien peoples, have from time immemorial been a special, unmixed people, resembling itself alone."

This sentence constitutes one of the many proofs that these people, linguistically akin to the Greeks and Romans, had lived apart from them long enough to create a distinct race type,—one of the finest physical types of the world. It is one of the great European races, still strong and active, leading in the work of modern civilization. Its vital energy and power of physical expansion, has been startlingly tremendous. For century after century, tribe after tribe swarmed over all Europe, lending to every nation with which they came into contact, northern blood and northern spirit. They have colonized America, Australia, South Africa, and many islands of the seas, and ruled vast territories in Asia. They have been driven forward by an irresistible impulse that brooks no opposition, counts no obstacle. The two poles mark the compass of their conquest. Peary and Amundsen, one an American, the other a Norseman, are the advance guard today,—with no more poles to conquer.

Such, then, are their physical characteristics.

Their intellectual and spiritual endowment was found to be even more astounding, when in the course of time, especially in the 13th and 16th centuries, the European situation gave them an opportunity to prove their mettle.

And now I am prepared to say: There is such a thing as **the Teutonic spirit**. It is a physical, an intellectual, and a moral quality. Aristotle says: "Some men are by nature free; others, slaves." Now it is evident that this means that some men have the **capacity** for freedom. That is exactly what all of the Teutonic tribes had: **capacity** for freedom.

Capacity for freedom, in a noble sense, presupposes physical, intellectual, and spiritual power. Freedom in this sense does not mean license. It means free action under a sense of responsibility to some governing power. In a worldly sense, this is the State. And here it is to be noted that the states founded by the Teutons have proved themselves to be the most enduring and powerful in the world: France, Germany, England.

In close connection with this quality of freedom comes the Teutonic quality of **loyalty**. This was to the Teuton "the breath of life of everything good and great." But it was this same quality that played havoc with the Teuton when he came in contact with older civilizations and bestowed his loyalty upon things that were clogs and chains to his free-

dom. For it must be remembered that the Teutons entered upon the stage of European history, as did the Vikings later, not as barbarians,—for they were free men with all that that implies,—but in a way as children, and they often fell into the hands of the designing representatives of decadent institutions.

The old Roman Empire had opened its civic gates to the nations of the world and, in a sense, to the rabble of the earth. Its populace came to be a racial chaos. But Rome was destined, nevertheless, to remain the seat of mighty power, whose toils in the course of time were woven so firmly about the Teutonic races that it took the majestic strength of Martin Luther to set them free. His name typifies the liberating forces of his age.

But before that great crisis called the Reformation, came, the Teuton was gradually becoming conscious of his powers and endowments, and was learning to prize them. He was getting to know that **freedom** was the basis of his Teutonic nature, and that his proudest word, **loyalty**, should rest on the foundation rock of free self-determination; in other words, that his loyalty should be bestowed on things worthy of himself and his Teutonic instincts. He was beginning to understand what Shakespeare, that great Teutonic giant, in Hamlet, that greatest of Teutonic tragedies, so beautifully expressed:

“To thy own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

That is the salvation of any man, as it is that of any nation.

Goethe once said: “It was the Teutonic races who first introduced into the world the idea of personal independence.” And this, I may add, has been to the Teuton the polar star in his long night of combat to regain his ancestral inheritance.

Freedom, independence: these are the things that the Teutonic spirit has fought for against the insidious power of Rome, and these are the gifts it has bequeathed to modern civilization. With them have come all the splendid achievements of the best representatives of the race,—and their name is legion. They are the two pinions that have borne humanity heavenwards.

The Teutons have, in certain particulars, been excelled by the Greeks and Romans. The Greeks declined because they lacked the great governmental instinct; they were subjugated by Rome. Rome declined because she admitted all

the world,—the slaves and degenerates of all races,—to her citizenship.

The Teutons, take it all in all, have become the equals—aye, the superiors—of Greece and Rome, because they possess a happy combination of the best qualities of both, with special characteristics of their own, in harmonious development. For they have produced poets like Shakespeare and Goethe, artists like Rembrandt and Thorwaldsen, musicians like Beethoven and Wagner, philosophers like Locke and Kant, warriors like Wellington and Washington, statesmen like William the Conqueror and Lincoln, jurists like Blackstone and Marshall, reformers like Wyclif and Luther, scientists like Newton and Darwin, inventors like Watt and Edison—all as great in their respective fields as any the world has known.

It is to this race, whose attainments have reached the very pinnacles of human endeavor, that Rollo, the representative of the Scandinavian North, belongs. And this proud occasion offers an opportunity to discuss some of the qualities contributed by his special branch of the Teutonic race to the grand achievements of later centuries.

I have dwelt on the Teutonic spirit of freedom as a chief characteristic. It is not too much to say that this spirit was found in its highest potency among the tribes of the Scandinavian North; for the mountain fastnesses and the salt sea of a bracing northern clime fostered an unquenchable love of liberty, of which the poets Wergeland, Ibsen, and Bjørnson are the modern embodiment. And the old Viking spirit still survives in the North. Roald Amundsen is its most modern manifestation.

Now the old spirit of freedom, and its concomitant qualities, arose in the North, not only from race, but from such pronounced environment as Scandinavia offers. It became a vast breeding-ground of hardy freemen.

This was a fact of momentous importance; for there came a time in the history of Europe when the spirit of freedom was all but crushed out by the papal power of Rome; and the infusion of fresh blood and new spirit from the ozone-laden lands of the North that came with the Vikings, was sorely needed in the great combats with Rome, especially in the 16th century, the age of the Reformation.

Even after the fall of the old Roman Empire, caused by Teutonic tribes, Rome as a governmental center, was a magic name. Kings, emperors, and bishops conjured with it. It dazzled powerful Teutonic princes of central Europe; and the irony of it is that a Teutonic prince, the father of Charles the Great, helped to establish the papal throne. Charles the Great (Charlemagne) was crowned emperor by the pope.

This virtually meant submission to Rome, and it sowed the seeds of endless wars and strife. That great Teuton, the founder of France and Germany, had been dazzled by Rome.

Charles the Great's empire crumbled soon after his death (in 814), and in due course of time, the pope declared himself lord and master of all crowns, and claimed, moreover, that he alone was Christ's representative on earth. He could give regal power to earthly princes and make them kings by the grace of God. They, in turn, claimed rightful ownership of all land, and unlimited authority over all subjects. In other words: men,—heirs of free Teutonic fathers,—had become slaves—had unconsciously sold themselves.

Here was the fatal turning point. Charles the Great was a Teuton in spirit. But he coquetted with Rome, and left a heritage that has ridden Europe like a nightmare ever since. As the founder of Germany, he should have remained on Teutonic soil, fostered Teutonic institutions and literature, founded a Teutonic church for his people, and left enfeebled Rome to her own devices. But for the loyal support of Teutonic princes, the papal power would have gone down.

So we see that the clash of the Teutonic spirit with Rome, which has not yet ended, does not turn primarily on matters of religious faith, but on questions of temporal power and racial instinct. In his association with Rome, Charles failed to follow his Teutonic instinct of freedom. He came to believe in the unrighteous, unchristian, un-Teutonic practice of conversion by force. Untrue to himself as a Teuton, he became false to all the Teutons of ages to come. The modern civilized world has groaned under the consequences of his false step.

I make no charge against the faith of Catholics, nor do I say a word concerning the best methods of saving men's souls and of glorifying God, when I declare that religious toleration is natural to the Teuton as a man who has deep sentiments of freedom, and to whom religion is an inner experience. "Behold the kingdom of God is within you!" These profound, epoch-making, yet mysterious words of Christ have the greatest affinity to Teutonic nature. The disciples did not understand them, but Wyclif, Zwingli, and Luther did.

But Rome neither preached nor practiced religious toleration, nor believed in intellectual liberty. Now Rome may be right and the Teuton wrong. I am here only presenting the fact that a genuine Teuton, **in the full and conscious possession of his powers of instinct and of reason**, simply cannot bend on this point. He cannot live in intellectual and spiritual bondage.

But the immature Teutons of early Europe were as big children in the hands of Rome; and soon we see the Teutonic Franks teaching Christianity to the Saxons, their neighbors

and kinsmen, with sword in hand. And proud Norsemen, like Olaf Trygvason and Olaf the Saint, in their misdirected zeal, later did the same thing.

The inherent power and appealing beauty and tenderness of the gospel of Christ needed no such stark methods. Only time and patience were needed,—such Christian patience and fervor as were displayed by the Irish and Anglican missionaries who first brought the gospel to the Gauls and North Germans. Those devout men were not the emissaries of any worldly power; they aspired only to be disseminators of Christianity and culture, and might have continued for centuries so to be, but for the alliance of Charles the Great with Rome.

The Goths, too, a Teutonic tribe who did not get their Christianity from Rome, were humbly evangelical and tolerant. They had the gospels translated into their own language. In childlike simplicity they read the simple but mysterious words of Christ, and sent up from their humble homes fervent prayers for the coming of His kingdom.

Rome, on the other hand, declared that the Bible was to be read solely in Latin, hence only by the learned, and came, furthermore, to advocate the dogma of systematic intolerance and of the punishment by death of heterodoxy. That dogma eventually came to be law, when the Inquisition began its slaughter, to the everlasting disgrace of Christian civilization.

Here, indeed, was a summons for the rescue of agonizing humanity! And in the course of time, particularly during the Reformation, when the Teutonic spirit was aroused to its profoundest depths, the protest and the relief came.

It was not complete succor and rescue. The distress was too deep for hasty healing. Martin Luther did not free the church from royal power. He dared not. This wrung his great Teutonic heart; but the exigencies of the situation demanded the decision that he gave. The battle against the divine right of kings was to be fought out elsewhere,—by the colonists on American soil, and by the mad uprising of the French people.

Friends and Fellow Citizens! It is only with such a background as I have here tried to portray, that the significance of the Vikings can be adequately presented.

It were an easy matter to pile up pyramids of facts from Viking history. They would be a meaningless burden to your mind. Let me rather draw the general outlines,—touch on general principles, so as to enlighten the understanding rather than burden the memory.

When the Viking first appears upon the stage of the world's history, he is joyous and exuberant, and ambitious for gain and glory. He hunts and robs; he pillages and plunders. Then he plows and tills in foreign lands. Later, he builds, not only

homes and churches, but states and kingdoms. Still later, his descendants begin to think,—to have convictions, and to act on those convictions. Then he becomes of real and vital importance to the world. But much went before this consummation.

I have spoken of Charles the Great's betrayal of the Teutonic spirit. It was he that first stirred the Danish Vikings into acts of hostility,—aroused the war spirit in them. He attempted with force to christianize the Saxons, the neighbors of the Danes, and met haughty opposition from both. The conquest of the Saxons meant danger to the Danes. This aroused their militant chief Godfred. Sailing to the land of the Frisians with a fleet of two hundred ships, he subjugated them, and then began to scheme nothing less than the overthrow of Charles himself, and was making preparations to advance on Aachen, his capital, when Godfred was mysteriously slain, in the year 810, four years before the death of Charles. The fact that Frankish chroniclers considered Godfred's death a special act of Providence for the protection of a Christian land, indicates that Godfred was a foe to be feared. It is vain to speculate on what might have happened, had he lived.

Godfred's expedition was but a premonitory signal announcing the oncoming of forces that were to wage desperate warfare in the Christian lands of the North Sea countries for more than a century. They gradually came to constitute a mighty army, directed by bold, tried, and daring chieftains. They did not fight from ships, for there were no foes on the sea. Charles the Great had no ships, neither did Alfred the Great, when the Vikings first came to disturb his kingdom, though he soon had a navy built on a Viking model.

Now this great army of increasing thousands was armed, equipped, and maintained with superior skill and foresight, until the conquest of Normandy, a century after the death of Godfred. This North Sea army was mainly Danish, but there were many Norsemen in it, too; in what proportion it is impossible to say.

The army did not confine its activities to the northern coasts of Germany and France. In connection with expeditions from Norway, a great campaign was waged that did not end until half of England, large tracts of Ireland, Scotland, and the Western Isles, were conquered and settled. Attack after attack was made in quick succession and with wonderful military astuteness, and with ever increasing strength and numbers, until all Christendom quaked and trembled. Lured at first by the wealth and luxury of civilized centers, they fought like demons to possess them, spreading terror and destruction wherever they came. Sometimes they met their equal, as in Alfred the Great,—that noble Saxon,—but not often. Europe was defenceless, and almost helpless.

From the conquered lands in the British Isles, expeditions swept along the western coast of France and Spain, sometimes even entering the Mediterranean, and harrying in North Africa and Italy.

On the other hand, Swedish Vikings went east across the Baltic, founded a Russian state, then, in 865, through the interlacing rivers of Russia, rowed into the Black Sea, and with a fleet of over two hundred boats, appeared before Byzantium (Constantinople), the eastern capital of the Roman Empire. Again, in 907, while Rollo was harrying in France, the Swedes appeared before Byzantium with two thousand boats, and were only bought off by an enormous ransom.

This will indicate that the Viking expeditions from the three Scandinavian countries actually embraced all Europe,—not only in one grand, encircling tour, but repeatedly. To and fro, like a mighty wave, they surged from one end of Europe to the other. And before the force of the great Exodus was spent—for eventually the Viking age became a great migration in search of new homes—they had crossed the stormy North Atlantic, without chart or compass, planted a great and noble colony in Iceland, which still endures, one in Greenland that lasted nearly five centuries, and even attempted the colonization of the American continent.

The exploration and colonization of Greenland in the latter part of the 10th century by Eric the Red (the father of Leif) was a most marvelous achievement,—a feat as daring and dangerous as Roald Amundsen's run into the south polar region. And the attempted colonization of Vinland by Thorfinn Karlsevne and his wife Gudrid, so delightfully described in one of the old sagas, deserves to be commemorated in stone or bronze by Norwegian pioneers in America. For they were the first colonists on the American continent.

And now I ask: What words can describe the physical energy, the intellectual force, and the intrepidity of spirit requisite to execute such vast military campaigns, such enormous racial migrations, and such bold pioneer explorations into unknown arctic regions? It staggers the mind!

And then it is not to be forgotten that the clash of the Viking Age struck fire and kindled a great literary activity, especially among the Norse Vikings who fared farthest afield from Rome and settled in the islands of the North Atlantic. It was the storm and stress, the surging turbulence and unrest of the Viking period, that produced old Norse poetry. The North, so to speak, burst into song, and thus left a heritage of old Norse poetry, as vital and expressive of the age that produced it as was Homeric literature. Nor was this only a brief outburst. The spirit endured for generations, and did not subside until, in Iceland, a great prose literature sprang up, in which, in

classic form and cast, the struggles and achievements of the race were recorded and passed on to posterity,—something the continental Teutons did not achieve.

If we would note the high-water mark of ancient Teutonic poetry and prose, we must seek it in the Eddas and Sagas,—literary products that would adorn the annals of any nation's history,—that stand worthily by the side of Homeric achievement. And I do not speak these words in an effervescence induced by the spirit of this occasion. They voice the opinion of great Teutonic scholars.

Moreover, it is only through Old Norse literature that we get any definite idea of ancient Teutonic religion and worship. If we would study Teutonic mythology, we must seek the old Norse Eddas, which are real fountains of ancient Teutonic life.

But this is not the occasion to discuss that subject. I have referred to the Eddas and Norse mythology in order to call attention to the fact that the heathen Vikings had in their blood and souls that great quality of artistic creation that distinguished the ancient Greeks, and to indicate that the ancient Scandinavians, too, had pondered on the great riddle of existence, and had tried to formulate a philosophy of life. We find it in that profound and beautiful conception of Ygdrasil, the Tree of Life, and in that colossal tragedy, Ragnarok, the Doom of the Gods.

Let no man say, then, that the Scandinavians of the Viking Age were barbarians,—devoid of civilization. The fact that they understood and practiced the art of poetry,—the greatest and highest of all arts,—and that they built ships on beautiful lines—like the Gokstad and Oseberg ships, so recently unearthed—makes that charge ridiculous.

Alfred the Great of England did not consider them barbarians. He knew from experience that they were indefatigable warriors. But he defeated them, and then he discovered that by means of the Gospel of Christ,—worthily put before them, without threat or compulsion, in a true spirit of Teutonic tolerance,—he could turn them into peaceable settlers. He treated them as his equals,—in war as foes, in peace as Christian brothers. What a great, and wise, and noble man Alfred was! And a great enough Teuton not to despise his mother tongue! He did not frown on the Viking invaders as “stingful wasps and ravening wolves,” as the monks called them; for he knew, as none other, that in the 5th century his Saxon ancestors came to Britain as the Vikings came in the 9th, in a mighty Teutonic swarm, out of the old Teutonic hive.

How many thousands of Danes and Norsemen settled in the British Isles, and eventually dropped into the common mass of Englishmen, it is impossible to say. But they came in sufficient numbers to make England “mistress of the seas” at a

critical moment of her history, when brave seamen were needed to save her from death and destruction at the hands of Spanish hosts.

Let a modern American poet speak on the Viking-tide in England:

“As, in a gale,
A mighty tidal wave, hōlp by the winds,
Breaks on some isle, and overwhelms the land,
All things submerging; so, on Britain’s isle,
The Viking-tide, in waves successive, breaks,
And overflows the land; o’erflows save where,
In west and north, the mountain fastnesses
Of Wales and Caledonia lift their towers.
Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Norsemen, Danes,—
One people called by many names, one race
Of ocean-warriors, golden-haired they come.

“Methinks as in a dream I see them now.
With tossing-prows far out at sea beheld,
With spears and helmets through the ocean mists
Flashing, they come; unheralded; with dread
Watched by those spirits pusillanimous
Whose purblind eyes see not in these fierce foes
Heaven’s chosen seed,—the saviours of the land.
Wild giants they, wet with the salt sea-foam,
But in their lives the primal virtues shine—
Strength, courage, justice, boundless energy,
Truth-telling, love of home, contempt of death,
High wisdom, and all else that makes the man—
And through them is old Europe born again.”

And thus England became a land, where, in the fulness of time, the Teutonic Spirit was to clinch and wrestle with the giant Rome,—give to her people the King James version of the Bible, and finally to come into her full inheritance and bequeath to humanity her fairest flower—Shakespeare!

And now it remains to tell that in England’s great struggle with Rome, out of which she came as the great champion of political and intellectual liberty—of which the American colonies were the heirs—Rollo, Duke of Normandy, plays no inconspicuous part; for William the Norman, the Conqueror of England, the great master-mind of English governmental methods, was an heir of Rollo’s blood, title, and domain,

Professor Rhys, of Oxford University, has recently said: “Few of the states of modern Europe have not had their history profoundly modified by the Scandinavian conquest of the Viking period.”

This applies to France, as well as to England, though not in so deep and comprehensive a sense.

The great event of the ninth century is the fall of the empire raised by Charles the Great; that of the tenth century is the rise of the national kingdoms of Germany, France, and Italy. In these two events, the Vikings had their share. After the death of Charles, there was the greatest strife and discord among his heirs. This ceaseless dissension was a standing invitation to Viking invasion. These incursions were almost innumerable, and at times, of such a character that sober men were seriously disquieted by the fear of a complete heathen conquest of the empire north of the Alps. People actually expected the crack of doom. And the Vikings were repeatedly paid fabulous amounts for peace. But in the year 885, the brilliant chieftain Godfred was treacherously slain at a conference; moreover, a great invasion into Saxon territory met annihilation, whereupon a shout of rejoicing went up to heaven from both the continent and England. The ardor of the great Viking-tide in Germany was checked. German soil was invaded no more. One great campaign remained: the siege of Paris.

Preliminarily, a Viking fleet appeared before Rouen, which had not seen the common foe for over forty years. Tradition says that Rollo fought in this battle against Rouen.

Then comes the siege of Paris, farther up the Seine. According to one chronicler, thirty thousand Vikings were gathered here. It seems impossible. At any rate, men's hearts were paralyzed with fear, and the emperor, Charles the Fat, was dallying in a foreign land.

But a doughty defender of the city appeared in Count Odo, who, through his bravery, became King of France. And a doughty defender was needed, for the seasoned Vikings had become past-masters in all the arts of war, and their goal seemed nothing less than the conquest of all France.

The siege of Paris is a tale to chill the blood, and nothing came of it except the fact that the magnificent defense here maintained, made Paris the seat of government in France. The Vikings had been checked, the advance into the interior of France stayed, the death knell of the dynasty of Charles the Great was sounded, and the separation came forever between France and Germany.

Thus we see that the great Viking campaigns for the complete conquest of Germany and of France had failed. As in England, their plans had been too gigantic.

Here is where Rollo shines. He confined his ambition within narrower limits, thus creating the only permanent northern state within Charles the Great's ancient empire. When the chroniclers again speak, some years after the siege of Paris,

Rollo was in possession of Rouen. He continued his devastation until at last Charles the Simple granted him, by treaty, the territories which were already his own, and now known as Normandy. This was in the year 912.

After having gained this firm foothold, the Viking invasions ceased, while Rollo was baptized and called Robert, Duke of Normandy. He divided the land among his ablest warriors, from whose number sprang the Norman nobility, famous in history and poetry, song and story, for their bravery and their proud and chivalric spirit.

In spite of the misery and woe that the Vikings caused in France, the settlement in Normandy soon produced beneficent results. They were progressive in every direction. They became the best representatives of the new nationality. They came as heathens, the dire foes of the church, but their children became its staunchest defenders, and the pioneers of the crusades. The French historian Martin says:

“The gospel conquered the Scandinavians, and no sooner were they Christians than they put themselves, with all their energy, at the head of Christianity, of young France, and of the new civilization. Everywhere they took the initiative. They renounced their language as they did their gods, to seize upon the French language and make it the vehicle of a new poetry.”

And now it is important to note that the most far-reaching event in the history of the Normans is the fact that it was Normandy that gave to England, and to the world, William the Conqueror. And among the striking things in his career is the fact—in line with the theme of my address—that he, like the Norwegian King Sverre, dared, more than once, to defy mighty Rome (**talte Roma midt imod!**).

The English historian Freeman, says of William: “That the history of England for the last eight hundred years has been what it is, has largely come of the personal character of this single man. . . . Stranger and Conqueror, his deeds won him a right to a place on the roll of English statesmen, and no man that came after him has won a right to a higher place.”

These are illuminating words, and need no comment.

And now we are prepared, I trust, to understand the following ringing and comprehensive words by the great scholar, Max Mueller:

“Though the Old Norse is but a dialect of the same language that the Angles and Saxons brought to Britain, though the Norman blood is the same blood that floods and ebbs in every German heart, yet there is an accent of defiance in that rugged northern speech, and a spring of daring madness in that throbbing northern heart, which marks the Northman wherever he appears, whether in Iceland or in Sicily, whether on the Seine or on the Thames.”

Will future historians add to this paragraph a line on you Northmen in America? Is there defiance in your rugged Northern speech? Is there a spring of daring madness in your throbbing northern heart? There should be, and this spirit in you should flash and leap,— do battle for political freedom, intellectual liberty, and Teutonic tolerance; for these things we have not yet completely achieved. Some of the rusted and dangling shackles of Rome are still clogs to our freedom.

But we are making progress. Witness the glorious achievement of the great convocation of Norsemen in this city of Fargo a month ago!

And now, my final and encouraging words are the great Teutonic principle: The enlightenment of the few means despotism; the enlightenment of the masses means liberty.

Turn we now to the proud ceremony of the hour.

Rollo, the Viking the founder of Normandy, of Norman prowess and chivalry; the legislator for his nation; the father of his people; the proud progenitor of warriors and statesmen,—of kings and emperors still enthroned—we desire to do honor to the Teutonic spirit embodied in his name. And so we have builded him a monument in democratic America.

Let the curtain rise!



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